

IN DEFEAT, U.S. POLITICAL CANDIDATES GRACIOUSLY CONCEDE

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WASHINGTON, AUGUST 28 -- After a close and bitterly fought election, Republican U.S. Senator George Allen of Virginia stood in front of his supporters in November 2006 and formally conceded his race for re-election to Jim Webb, his Democratic opponent, saying, "The owners of the government have spoken and I respect their decision."

The loss of that one seat to the opposition party was enough to shift political control of the Senate to the Democrats, allowing Webb and Allen's other political rivals to set the legislative agenda and chair the Senate committees in the 110th Congress.

Allen, in his concession speech, followed an honored tradition in U.S. politics by congratulating his successor and wishing him well.

"I wish Jim Webb well and pledge him my absolute cooperation in the transition," Allen said, promising that he would do all in his power to act "with respect for the wishes of the people of Virginia ... to bind factions together for a positive purpose."

Americans have learned to take for granted the idea that no matter how close or divisive their official election results may be, the losing candidates and political parties will peacefully hand power over to the winners.

They can look back to the election of 1800, a bitter contest between Federalist President John Adams and his Democratic-Republican challenger Thomas Jefferson, as the precedent behind their country's tradition of peacefully transferring power from a ruling party to its bitter political rivals.

The one instance where this tradition was not honored occurred in 1860, when Southern states and representatives refused to accept President Abraham Lincoln's election and withdrew from the United States, setting off the country's five-year civil war.

Voters choose approximately one-third of the members of the U.S. Senate and all members of the House of Representatives, as well as many state governors, every two years, even in "midterm" elections that fall in the middle of a president's four-year term. These elections are significant because they offer the opportunity for a change in the political control of Congress and sometimes serve as an unofficial referendum on presidential policies.

The 2006 U.S. midterm elections illustrated the inherent stability of the electoral process in the United States. The peaceful transfer of power is a hallmark of strong democracy, and American elections repeatedly have resulted in orderly transitions in the political control of the

nation. The cooperation and compromise inherent in the American system of government ensure that the government's business will continue in a peaceful manner after the elections.

The close presidential election of 2000 between President Bush and Democrat Al Gore ultimately was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court on December 12, 2000. Election results from the state of Florida showed Bush's margin of victory over Gore so slim that mandatory vote recounts were necessary until the court voted 5-4 to end the recounts and allowed Florida to certify its results in favor of Bush.

The joint session of Congress that convened January 6, 2001, to officially certify the 2000 electoral results included Gore's participation as the sitting vice president and head of the U.S. Senate. Several representatives who objected to Florida's certified election results challenged the proceedings. However, since electoral objections needed to be co-sponsored by a senator, Gore ruled each of them out of order and his fulfillment of his constitutional duties enabled the peaceful and orderly transfer of power, even at the cost of the Democratic Party's control of the executive branch and Gore's own presidential aspirations.

Although the results of the election are disappointing to the losing candidates, most acknowledge, sometimes very eloquently, that respecting the wishes of the American people is the fundamental requirement for aspiring to public office.

"There was a strong headwind working against us," said Harold Ford, the unsuccessful Democratic contender in 2006 for one of Tennessee's Senate seats, "but in the end the choice belonged to the good people of Tennessee. They ignored distractions and distortions, and instead focused on the different qualifications of two men and ... made up their mind."

In his concession speech after losing the 1992 presidential election to Bill Clinton, President George H.W. Bush said: "Here's the way we see it and the country should see it, that the people have spoken, and we respect the majesty of the democratic system. There is important work to be done, and America must always come first. So we will get behind this new president, and wish him well."

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